Tia R. Shamoon

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Florida

The American peninsula located on the southeastern and longest coastline in the U.S. is referred to as the Sunshine State—tepid bath-water like climate and sugar white beaches; salty film byproducts of slow and rhythmic breezes; home to state-specific rare and/or endangered species such as: Red Wolf, Osceola wild turkey, American alligator, mink, and the Florida panther just to name a few—where vacationers flock, fishermen dock, and my life having knocked on death’s door.

I call myself Tia. It is 1994, and I am being held against my will—or so I am trying to manipulate myself into feeling, being the emotional hormone-driven teenager that I am, and I do know what I’m talking about—I learned about that stuff in the fifth grade. I was awakened this morning by plasma coagulating screams. I would tell you that I prayed for safety, but I didn’t. I hoped that the Killer Tomatoes had come to rescue me from this bondage. Alas, it was not so. That is all the backstory you need to know for now. So, now my sister and I are tied down by a belt. It is so tight, and I’m finding a hard time breathing.

My sister and I are held hostage by a mad woman and her minion. This woman insists that we drive 12 hours to Pensacola where her husband is stationed. The map calibers tell me it should be more than 12 hours, but what do I know? The red single cab Dodge Ram has three seatbelts, one driver, an oversized car-seat that comes with a fermenting minion, and two juveniles—my sister Tiffany and myself—wedged between the passenger manual window crank and gearshift of which this evil woman uses to slam into the car-seat each time she shifts into Reverse, 2nd, and 4th gears. When this happens, the minion snarls, kicks, and bites anything within reach. Don’t worry, I have not been bitten yet, but I cannot say the same for my sister. Once we have a chance to break free I will have her wounds cleansed and checked for mutations. The minion doesn’t relent until we are safely cruising in 5th gear for at least 10 miles, which is the distraction that I believe has instigated the geographical lapse of judgment in the crazy driver woman. We drove through Shreveport earlier, and the woman said we are heading towards Monroe. I think she is being untruthful. The time is eleven o’clock, seven hours since the takeover, and I have noticed an Interstate sign that reads *West*. We are an hour from Texas. After mental calculations I figure we have been going in that direction for two hours, and thinking back through my junior high education I am pretty sure that Florida is in the East and California is in the West, but this cracked madwoman refuses to believe that simple 4th grade fact. We drive until we cross the Louisiana/Texas state-line. Woman Driver violently shifts into 4-wheel-drive to gallop across the median and onto the East moving side. The shifter has hit the car-seat, and my sister has been bitten again. I don’t know how much longer we can survive this.

We’ll get away. We can read each other’s thoughts. She looks at me, and I feel her misery. When we want to read each other’s thoughts, we look at each other and our eyes roll around in our head while we completely disregard everything else around us. A sense of power and euphoria energizes us with this exercise, so sometimes we do it for no reason for the purpose of reactivating our vitality. It weakens our targets and has been helpful in causing distress with our captors.

The sun has fallen and it is now 7:00 pm. We have arrived at some sort of compound where many other juveniles have been taken. They sit next to the pool and stare stupidly into the sky. They turn to acknowledge us, but it seems that they can also read minds because my sister and I can feel the energy reverberating from their eye movements. The minion is released from the car-seat contraption. Our captor removes the car-seat and exposes the lock that releases the belt. My sister and I spring out of the truck like released coils. This woman has stated that we will be held against our will for two weeks. We must integrate into the commune and pretend to enjoy all amenities. Our lives have been properly threatened should we refuse.

We have spent the first week watching O.J. Simpson drive down the Interstate in his white Ford Bronco, first on live television and then the endless reruns that every network insists on broadcasting. Tiffany and I play dominoes every day, feed the raccoon that hangs out near the laundry-mat just outside our door, and take turns trying to close each other up inside the Murphy bed. We have made an educated decision that Murphy beds are not as cooperative in real life as they are on TV. The raccoon is part of our tactical plan to cause as much hate and discontent as possible.

Three is our magic number—the exact time that the imprisoner’s husband is released of his duties from a mystic place that he calls employment. This is the only time that we leave the compound. The female counterpart is too worried to leave without her husband. She is scared of us. The plan is working. We load the Dodge down with ice-chests full of drinks and snacks, then Tiffany and I climb in the back. The male and female demons with their minion ride in the cab with the air conditioner. There is no room in the front and I sense they know we will not jump out in an attempt of escaping. They take us to the beach every day at this time; another inescapable place due to lack of funds to cross the toll bridge back into the city. They have entrapped us with a financial dependence. These two are more clever than we thought, but they cannot trap us forever. The white beaches burn out feet worse than the asphalt roads do. We tear off our clothes and run down the dunes to relieve our feet in the cool ocean water that I’m sure works therapeutically as Epsom salt does. Late nights are spent leaning over the bathtub to rinse the sandy sugar out of our swim suits and body crevices.

We are nearing the end of our second week. The two evil doers continue to take us to the beach and continue to threaten our lives. If we continue to cooperate, we will be released earlier than expected for good behavior. My sister and I play out our theatrical performance of stripping on our way down the hill to the water, but we are stalled just before diving in because we are forced to gather rocks in order to anchor all of our items to the ground against the constant gales that are blowing debris down the shoreline. After all things have been secured, we ignore the significance of this incident and continue swimming in the dark rolling waters that produce higher waves than before in order for us to body surf towards shore. The male hijacker says a storm is coming and we won’t be able to come to the beach the next evening, but the mayor says it is more than a storm and we should evacuate. Tropical Storm Alberto has arrived.

We retreat from the beach and head back to the compound. The male is drunk and on the communal balcony with a rifle. He is threatening anybody who comes within the exposure of the street lights to not get watermelon seeds on his truck. I am lying on the bed with my sister, hoping that he passes out before he actually shoots somebody because I just know the police will come and I’ll be stuck in Florida without any place to go. I thinks it’s around 3:00 am. He is making his way to his bed but I can’t be sure.

I am positive that both evil axis are still drunk as they awaken because he is insisting we go surfing. He won’t listen to me when I tell him that we don’t have surf boards and that an “almost hurricane” has hit us during his passionate stint of territorial requests over a truck. The local weatherman has issued an advisory that cautions the need for going near the water during the next several days until the rip tide leaves. But that doesn’t stop these whackers. Off we go, driving through the toll bridge, parking on the side of the road, running down the dunes…but we stop at the shoreline where the lapis lazuli-colored water rushes over the sand. The aggressors slap at the water as they ran in, ushering us on but my sister and I proceed with caution. Through the clear glass water pane we watch the fish swim around our ankles; the water remains knee high as we wade out further and further from the sugar-sand. My sister rides the wave back in and I stay behind to wait on the next transit wave while patiently standing next to the malevolent male.

Right on schedule it arrives—I fling my arms out in a “T” shape and stand high on my toes before leaping as high as I can as the wave approaches. Instead of catching the rolling current, it snatches my feet and drags me out as my fingernails scrape across the sand. It begins spinning me sadistically and I can no longer find my footing. Everywhere that I cast my eyes is a penetrating blue that makes every atom, every molecule around me meld into each other to resemble one endless void of atmospheric conditions as seen from outer space, which is where I feel that I have arrived once the gritty water begins shredding through my lungs. I can perceive the darkness coming from a whirling vortex that activates the sparkling phenomenon just in the peripheral of my vision. I stop kicking…my heavy arms are now buoyant as they float above my head. I am tired—exhausted—and I know this is it.

I want to let go, but I feel something rubbing against my back and my body is arched forward as my chest is being tugged upward…over and over…and I feel like oceanic road kill as the buzzards come for me, pulling at the meat between wave intervals. There is one last jerk before the immense glow from orange and pink horizon is scorching my eyes, and I realize that one of my wardens has found me. He is fishing me out by my bikini top. I wildly swim back to shore where I intend to stay.

Another week has passed, and because of the storm we have been unable to leave. We continue to go to the beach, but I remain on shore building sand castles with the minion while sucking on lozenges to relieve the raw sensations still left crawling down my trachea. I have been held against my will, but my sister and I have adapted for the time being. I have decided to call our hijackers by names referring to parental units, but I cannot bring myself to relate to the minion. She is wicked and knocks over my sand castles. We visit the Naval base and hang out in the bay afterwards to watch the fireworks for the 4th of July. We visit the beach one last time, and my sister has found a jellyfish and insists that we take it home. We fill a butter bowl with salt water and let the creature soak in it during the drive home, but after 15 hours riding in the back of that heat absorbing truck bed, the poor thing has been cooked alive. I sense the satire but I can’t find it amusing, so I do the proper thing by flushing it down the toilet.